Continue sub salvage, some officials urge

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WASHINGTON — Despite some congressional criticism of the CIA's quest for a sunken Russian submarine, some U.S. officials reportedly favor going ahead with the salvage operation.

Some key members of the administration reportedly feel the CIA operation is providing the United States with a propaganda coup as well as valuable military and technological information.

In the operation last summer, a CIA-sponsored research ship raised part of a Soviet submarine, armed with nuclear missiles, from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean northwest of Hawaii.

BUT THE remainder of the sub, including its nuclear missiles and code devices, remain on the ocean bottom. The Soviet Union has lost several other submarines, according to the CIA and at least one site is under surveillance by the Russians to guard against a recovery attempt.

President Ford has refused to comment on the disclosures but some of his White House advisers were reported to be strongly opposed to continuing the salvage attempt.

Moscow also has maintained an official silence on the affair.

Some members of Congress, however, have questioned the worth of the operation, reported to have cost $350 million.

HIGH intelligence sources say they got useful information from the part of the G Class Russian submarine they retrieved, even though it was one of Russia's older subs, diesel rather than nuclear powered.

Had they raised the whole vessel, they would have gotten Russian nuclear missiles and probably found code devices with which they could decipher 7-year-old messages and learn about the deployment of nuclear warheads around the world when the sub went down in 1968.

While the actual documents and equipment on the sub would be outdated, they would open a window on Soviet thinking about nuclear warfare, one intelligence source said.

Congressmen said that detente and President Ford's June summit with Soviet leaders would not be damaged by disclosure of the incident.

"I don't see how it could upset the summit unless they determined we were responsible for sinking it," said Sen. John Sparkman (D-Ala.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

THE SPECIALLY designed salvage boat is owned by billionaire Howard Hughes under a secret CIA contract.

The submarine incident will be a subject of House and Senate debate now under way on American intelligence operations.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Ida.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the incident showed the need for a close watch on the CIA's budget, which is never published and is known only to members of certain congressional committees.

"There has to be a limit on how much is spent on intelligence," Church said. "If we are prepared to pay Howard Hughes $350 million for an obsolete Russian submarine, it's little wonder we are broke."

Church told reporters Thursday that it was possible Hughes would be called by the committee as a witness.